

Breaking Apart

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Summary: What if Lee and Amanda had split up?

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Synopsis: This takes place right after The Man Who Died Twice, but the tag for that episode never happened. It disregards all episodes that came after. An attempt to answer the question, what would have happened if Lee and Amanda had broken up?

Breaking Apart

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Chapter 1

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Amanda stood at the sink, hands covered in soapy water, staring at her empty backyard - a backyard that would never again see Lee Stetson. It hurt more than she imagined possible just to think that. Logic told her to get on with the dirty dishes, and her life away from him, but she couldn't seem to make her hands obey.

"Mom?" her son Phillip came up behind her, obviously

concerned.

"Yes, sweetheart?" Amanda hated the hitch in her voice, and cleared her throat to try and make it go away.

"You really should make Jamie do the dishes since I cooked."

"I don't mind doing them. It's habit, I suppose."

"Are you okay?" Phillip cocked his head at his mother. He didn't know what was wrong, but he knew when someone looked ready to cry.

"I'm fine â€" just a little preoccupied tonight. You better get upstairs and finish that essay, it's getting late."

Amanda watched her son's back as he left the kitchen and reminded herself that he and Jamie were the reason this had to be. The reason she had told Lee that it was over.

And Lee hadn't taken it well.

* * * * *

Five hours and thirteen minutes after she'd told him, he wasn't taking it any better.

Lee had moved from his desk to Amanda's. The only movement he'd made in all that time. Staring across the room, he absently twisted Amanda's ring around his little finger. This was where he'd given it to her, so it seemed fitting that he sit here now that he'd been given it back.

He still couldn't believe she was really gone. Leaning back in his chair, Lee closed his eyes and recalled their earlier conversation.

After they had returned from wrapping up the mess with Lee's associate Khai, Amanda had excused herself to their upstairs office. A thousand thoughts ran through her head simultaneously, most centering on the death or capture of her sons, her mother, her fiancÃ©. It became too much to bear and she nearly collapsed into her chair.

"Amanda?" Lee asked, opening the Q-Bureau door, "Are you still up here?"

"Yes, right here."

Lee, not liking the shakiness he heard in his partner's voice, closed and locked their office door. It took a lot to shake up Amanda King these days. She had seen too much in their three years together to let things get to her this way.

Gathering her up off the chair, Lee wrapped his arms around her. Running his hands up and down her back, he tried to comfort her in the best way he knew.

"Lee," Amanda broke their embrace and crossed the room. She couldn't be in his arms right now. "I need to go home."

"That's right â€" Phillip is practicing his home ec dinner tonight, right?" Lee asked, not liking the distance in her tone, or in her stance.

"Yes, but that's not what I mean," Amanda said to the floor, unable to meet his eyes. "I need to leave the Agency."

Lee felt his heart skip a beat. He had a bad feeling about this.

"That doesn't sound like you mean until tomorrow morning."

"I don't. I can't do this anymore. I can't risk my family anymore than I already have. You said it yourself, that could have been Phillip or Jamie." Amanda was doing her level best not to fall apart, but felt the seams of her composure giving way. "Everything worked out this time, but how much longer can the odds stay in my favor?"

"Okay. I understand. Why don't you take a couple of days and recuperate? This has been a rough time for both of us â€" the last couple of months have been, really. I'll call you tomorrowâ€|"

"No." One word. Just one word and it sliced through Lee like a samurai's blade.

"No?"

"That's right. No calling, no stopping by, no showing up in my backyard. I need time away. From all of this, from you." She held out her hand to Lee and instead of taking his, as he thought she might, she placed something in it. Her ring.

"Amanda," Lee ran a hand through his hair, trying to keep the panic and desperation out of his voice. And failing miserably. "If you just want to spend some time apart, what is this?"

"Just what you think it is. I can't marry you, Lee. Not now, not anymore. I have to go home," Amanda stated firmly, refusing to break down in front of him.

And with the same fleeting motion that had brought her into his life, Amanda King was suddenly out of it.

Chapter 2

Lee Stetson sat at his desk, staring at the empty one a few feet away. A week hadn't made a bit of difference to the empty space in his office, or in his heart. Amanda had taken more than her presence from the Agency; she'd taken a piece of his soul. Suddenly, the job that had meant more to him than anything else for 11 years seemed like a fruitless pursuit.

"Lee?" Francine poked her head in the door of the Q-Bureau.

"What is it, Francine?" Lee exhaled, not really caring, but too polite to not answer.

"Nothing much. Just about fourteen reports that still need to be written up, and a series of threats against the Romanian Consulate

that need to be checked out. You know, the usual 'keeping the world safe for democracy' stuff," Francine said, in her usual manner. Her sarcasm never failed to get a rise out of him. It failed this time.

Lee looked up at his co-worker and barely registered the armload of files she was carrying.

"Whatever," was his only comment as he grabbed his jacket and left the office, leaving a flabbergasted Francine staring at the files in her arms. _This is getting out of hand,_ she thought.

* * * * *

Amanda sat at the foot of her closet, lost in a reverie. She had spent her week cleaning house, the only thing she could do to keep the sense of loss from overcoming her. Dotty had called her the White Tornado, but Amanda had let the jibe roll off her back.

It hurt so much not to be able to confide in her mother, to be unable to receive comfort from her at a time when she needed it the most. And it would have hurt Lee to know that the lack of support only strengthened her resolve to keep him out of her life.

That resolve had lasted the whole week, until she came to her closet.

She had kept her room until last, knowing it would be the final test of her decision. The memory of Lee's presence there had kept her away, to the point of sleeping on the couch. Every time she opened the door, she thought of the Stemwinder fiasco. Her heart remembered Lee jumping up at her arrival, the declaration of love from him, and the joy those words had given her after waiting so long to hear them.

Now, at her closet, she had found the box. It was just a shoebox, stuffed at the back, but what it contained was as precious to her as the boys' baby books. All of her tangible ties to Lee were here.

The shirt she had worn while she was Birol's hostage, the "Parisian Intrigue" script, as well as ticket stubs from Verdi and Europe. Even the recipe cards from the first case they had worked together.

A fresh wave of loss rolled over her, and she buried her head in her hands.

"Amanda?" her mother asked, knocking on the door.

"In here Mother." Amanda quickly replaced the lid on the box and stood, praying that her mother couldn't, or wouldn't, notice the tremor in her voice.

"Well, I was beginning to think that you were never going to use your room again. You slept on the couch again last night, didn't you?"

"Yes. I got involved in the late movie. It just seemed easier to stay there when it was over."

"You seem to be addicted to the late movie these days. I don't think you've spent a night up here in a week." Amanda put her arm behind her mother and led her from the bedroom. She had regained her composure, but needed to get away from the room.

"I guess I am still enjoying not having to get up and go to work in the mornings. It's nice to be able to do that again."

"I still don't understand why you left your job at IFF. You seemed to love it."

"It was just time to move on, Mother." Dotty noticed the sadness in her daughter's voice and knew she was hiding something. She wanted desperately to draw Amanda out, but knew that would be a waste of time. Amanda could be very stubborn when she wanted to be and Dotty knew she would just have to wait until Amanda was ready to talk.

"Whatever you say, dear. I was just coming up to remind you that Phillip needs to be picked up from soccer practice today. Do you want to do it or should I?"

"I'll do it. It's been so long since I've been able to do these things."

Grabbing her keys off the center island in the kitchen, Amanda headed out to try and resume the life she led before Lee Stetson had barged into it. If she kept telling herself that she could survive without Lee, that she was keeping her boys safe, and that her heart would mend, eventually her mind would accept it.

But it had been a week, and she still missed him, still loved him, and knew that he would remain a part of her forever.

That evening as Amanda was forcing herself back into the role of stay-at-home mother, Lee was settling himself rather well into a bottle of scotch.

Staring into the amber liquid, he realized that the pounding he heard wasn't his head, it was the door.

Raising himself off the couch, Lee staggered to the door and opened the peephole. For a crazy minute he had allowed his heart to pick up. Amanda had surprised him before, maybe she was as miserable as he was and had decided to

He cursed himself for allowing himself to dream as he opened the door to Francine.

"Lee, we need to talk," Francine said, pushing her way past him into the apartment.

"You talk. I'll drink." Lee bobbed and weaved his way back to the glass.

"No way, mister. You've had enough of that." Francine realized he was well over his limit when it took only a small shove to get Lee on the couch and the bottle poured down the sink.

Glancing in from the kitchen, she noticed that Lee hadn't moved from

where she'd left him, so she made some very strong coffee and left it to perk. She was going to get some answers from him. Tonight.

"Amanda?" Lee slurred in his semi-sleeping state as Francine finally returned.

"No, Lee. It's still me. And I need some answers from you. I am not going to let one of my oldest friends flush his career down the toilet. I think you're taking this a little over the top."

"Francineâ€|" Lee began, but she merely held up a hand to silence him.

"Quiet. I need to say this, okay. We all know that losing a partner is rough. But it's not as if she died, she just quit. We knew it was only a matter of time â€" you said it yourself a thousand times, Amanda was not cut out for this business. Now it's time to pick up and move on."

Satisfied with her speech, Francine sat back on the couch.

"Not just my partnerâ€|" Lee mumbled, "â€|my fiancÃ©e too." At that admission, Francine finally noticed the woman's engagement ring stuck on his little finger. But before she could comment, she realized that Lee had passed out.

Francine rose quietly from the couch, trying not to awaken him. Her jaw had yet to become rehinged from the bomb Lee had just dropped - a bomb that answered more than a few questions.

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Chapter 3

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The knock at his office door sounded like World War III to Lee. He knew when he cracked the seal on the scotch bottle last night that he would regret it, but thought that the few hours of oblivion would be worth it. He was wrong.

"Lee?" Billy called through the door.

"Come on in, Billy," Lee nearly whispered, the hangover making his own voice sound like a jackhammer.

Billy entered the Q-Bureau and took a seat on the edge of Amanda's desk. Francine had been in his office at eight that morning, grilling him on what he knew of Amanda and Lee's relationship. While they had never confided in him, Billy knew that their feelings had grown over the course of their working relationship, and had kept his mouth shut and his thoughts to himself. But when Francine had told him about Lee's statement the night before he knew it was time to bring everything out in the open between them.

"What is it now?" Lee asked, not raising his head from his desk.

"I need to talk to you about Amanda."

"There is no more Amanda, haven't you heard?" Lee sighed, wondering when he would be able to say that without feeling physical pain.

"That's bull and you know it. Now I don't pretend to know what happened between you two, or why. All I know is that it seems like I've lost two of my best agents. I want to know if there's anything I can do to fix this."

"Nope," came the muffled reply.

"Lee," Billy paused, gathering his thoughts. "You're in love, you got engaged. There has to be something you can do to."

That raised Lee's head from the desk, and brought bloodshot eyes staring at him.

"How did you know about that?"

"You said as much to Francine last night."

"I must have let it slip. Not that it matters anymore." Lee's head slumped back onto the desk.

"Doesn't matter?" Billy was getting exasperated with Lee, and was toying with the idea of beating some sense into him.

"No, Billy, it doesn't matter. I wish there was something we could do, there just isn't. I guess the nature of this business finally got to her. The danger, lying to her family, it all came to a head while we were helping Khai."

Billy's hung his head and sighed. He knew Khai's son had been taken in an effort to draw him out, and realized the effect that would have on Amanda. He also knew that Lee was right.

There was nothing they could do.

* * * * *

Amanda sat on the sidelines of the soccer field, watching as Phillip blocked the last goal attempt just as the referee blew the whistle signaling the end of the game. Standing with the other soccer moms, Amanda cheered and clapped as the team high-fived each other and enjoyed their victory. Monday games were pretty rare, but a rainy Saturday had postponed the usual weekend game.

"Mom, did you see that?" Phillip rushed over, still red-faced from the game.

"I sure did, sweetheart." But the comment was made to Phillip's back as he rushed back to his teammates. It hurt a little to realize that her little boy was growing up, that Mom's presence was nice, but not an integral part of the experience as it had been when he was younger.

Watching the other moms, and their husbands, sharing the victory with each other, made Amanda's heart ache all over again. Before they had parted ways, Lee had told her that he wanted to get to know the boys,

to become a part of their lives. A bittersweet smile crossed her face as she recalled his exuberance at buying houses, and horses, and playing softball in the backyard.

And she had thrown it all away.

Picking up her purse, Amanda walked over to Phillip and let him know it was time to leave. _But they're safe now,_ Amanda reminded herself as they walked to the car.

"Mom," Phillip spoke from the seat behind her.

"Yes, sweetheart?"

"Why did you quit your job?" Amanda nearly slammed on the brakes at the unexpected question.

"I told you. It was just time for me to move on."

Phillip seemed to consider this for a while and then spoke up again. Amanda was beginning to wonder if his constant questioning of everything was going to lead her son into the law, like his father.

"But you were really happy there, and this past week you've seemed so sad. Don't get me wrong, Mom. Jamie and I have really liked having you home with us again, but not if it's going to make you unhappy. Did we make you quit your job?"

"Oh, Phillip," Amanda desperately wanted to reach back and take his hand, but his sitting right behind her made that impossible. "It wasn't that at all. It was just time." But the excuse sounded flimsy, even to her.

"Can you get it back?"

Amanda met Phillip's eyes in the rearview mirror, and then she noticed the car coming at them much too fast.

Chapter 4

Francine stood outside of Lee's office door, wringing her hands. The call had come to her desk just a few minutes ago, and she knew she had to tell Lee. She gave the door two quick raps and opened the door.

"Lee?"

"Come on, Francine," Lee said, blowing out an impatient breath. "I am getting back on track, even working late, so back off."

"Lee?" It only took a second to hear the difference in her voice, but Lee immediately knew something was wrong.

"What is it?"

"There was a car accidentâ€¦It seemsâ€¦" Francine was having trouble finding the right way to say this. "I just got a call from the hospital. The ER nurse that worked on you during the Barnstorm incident called me. She thought I'd want to know that we had an agent

being brought in. Wanted to know if NEST should be called."

A sense of dread like he had never before experienced washed over Lee in waves.

"Amanda?" he choked out.

"She's fine, just some cuts and bruises. That's why she called me and not NEST."

"Then what?"

"It's Phillip," Francine cut him off, "he hasn't regained consciousness."

Lee was out of the office a split second later.

* * * * *

Amanda sat at her son's bedside, holding his limp hand in hers. It had happened so fast. The car behind them had lost its brakes and pushed them into the intersection. The new Jeep had borne the collision well, but Phillip had hit his head on the window. She refused to think about what would have happened if the impact had come from the driver's side, rather than the empty passenger side.

Wrapped in her thoughts, Amanda barely registered the hand on her shoulder. She just reached up to lace the familiar fingers with her own. A sense of peace, in spite of the seriousness of the situation, washed over her.

"Physically he's fine. He just has to wake up." Her voice cracked a little.

"I know," Lee whispered. "I spoke with the nurse. We've been through concussions before. It just takes time." Not wanting to break his contact with Amanda, he raised one finger to brush her jaw line.

Amanda knew she should let go of his hand, that she should stand up and thank him for coming, tell him that they would be fine. But the small contact of hand against hand had nearly unnerved her. Pushing him away had been the hardest thing she had ever done. She couldn't do it again.

"Lee," Amanda said as she rose from the chair and stepped into his arms. He held her tightly, letting her cry silent tears into his shoulder.

They stood like that for what seemed like hours when a slight rustling behind them got their attention.

"Mom?" Phillip whispered.

"Oh, sweetheart," Amanda stepped away from Lee, but kept her hand in his as she moved to her son's bed. "How do you feel?"

"My head really hurts," Phillip groaned and closed his eyes.

"The doctor said to expect that. I'll go get him, and Jamie and grandma. They're right outside."

Amanda rushed from the room, a spring in her step that had been missing for too long.

"Aren't you the doctor?" Phillip asked of Lee, who had remained behind.

"No, I'm Lee Stetson. I work, uh, worked with your mother." An uncharacteristic shyness struck him as he spoke for the first time with the boy he had watched grow for the past three years.

"It's nice to meet you," Phillip said.

Lee walked over to the bed to take Phillip's offered hand.

"Are you the reason she quit?"

"It's a long story, Phillip." Lee answered as truthfully as he could, then moved back as the room filled with doctors, nurses, and the rest of Amanda's family.

Amanda found Lee in the waiting room, just outside the emergency room. She had been afraid that he'd leave before they could talk. When he saw her approach, Lee rose preparing to tell her that he was glad Phillip would be okay and that he was leaving. But Amanda went straight into his arms and didn't give him the chance.

When she finally moved back enough for him to see her face, her smile quickened his heart.

"As I sat there holding Phillip's hand, I realized something. Bad things happen no matter where you work. You can't prevent them." Amanda raised herself and placed a light kiss on his lips. "I've missed you so much."

"I missed you, too," Lee tightened his arms around her, glorying in the familiar feel of this woman he loved more than life itself.

"I'm tied to you, Lee Stetson. Meant for you just as you are meant for me. Can you ever forgive me?"

"That's a pretty silly question." Lee smiled for what felt like the first time in years and took her ring from the chain around his neck. Amanda's heart danced at the sight of the dimples she thought she'd never see again.

"No," Amanda said, as he moved to replace it on her finger.

"No?" Lee's heart skipped a beat.

"Not if it means a return to the lying and sneaking around. I'll only put that ring back on my finger if it can stay there. It's time to come clean, Stetson."

"We may as well," Lee smiled down at her as he placed the ring on her finger. "Billy already knows, and I let it slip to Francine a few days ago."

"Oh my gosh," Amanda groaned. "The whole Agency must know by now."

"I love you, Amanda King. And I'll take out an ad in the Washington Post telling the world, if that's what it takes. I never want to live another week without you as my partner â€" both at work and away from it."

"Oh Lee," Amanda wrapped her arms around him, "I love you, too. But rather than the Post, can we start with my family."

Chapter 5

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"Hey, Phillip. How're you feeling?" Jamie asked his brother as he came in the door from school.

"Better. The headache is finally going away. Listen," Phillip lowered his voice to a whisper, "do you know what this is all about?"

"No," Jamie replied, matching his brothers tone, "but I am a little nervous. I mean you missed it the last time Mom called a family meetingâ€|"

Jamie stopped talking as he heard his mother and Mr. Stetson come in through the front door.

"Mother? Boys?" Amanda crossed the stairs into the family room to find her sons sitting together on the couch.

"We're here, Mom," Phillip called. "I think grandma's on the patio."

"Yes, I was, dear." Dotty said as she entered the room, "but I'm here now. So what's the family meeting about this time? More federal agents coming to see us?"

Lee coughed at that, but Amanda elbowed him in the ribs. Drawing chairs over for the two of them, Amanda drew in a deep breath and looked at Lee, who sat next to her.

Placing his hand at the small of her back, he tried to convey as much support as he could, but he knew how nervous she was. Amanda had nearly worn a path in the hardwood floors at the Q-Bureau before they had come back to the house.

"I don't quite know how to do this, so I'll just start at the beginning. Mother, do you remember the day I took Dean to the train station?"

Amanda spoke for an hour â€" filling in bits and pieces of the past three years. Men in red hats, mystery trips to Europe, late night floor waxing, and her final acceptance for training as a full time agent. It all came pouring out of her in a flood of words.

Dotty was the first to break the silence that followed. "So all those times you had to run to your club at all hours you were working as a..."

"As a spy, Mother, although we don't use that word."

"And that would make you?" Dotty asked Lee.

"The club, yes," Lee grimaced, "as well as her partner. You'll be proud to know, Mrs. West, that Amanda is one of the best agents we have."

"Of course it makes me proud, but I'm assuming this isn't something I can share with friends, though. Am I right?"

Lee placed his hand over Amanda's clasped ones. "Yes. Our business is, in its nature, a secret one. Outside of our badges, we don't carry cards listing our professions, but..."

That comment perked both of the boys' interest. "Badges?" they said in unison.

"Mom, can we see them?" Phillip asked, moving to the edge of the couch.

Amanda met Lee's eyes and reached into her purse for hers as Lee removed his from his jacket pocket. They flipped them open simultaneously.

"This is too cool," Phillip said, reaching over to take them. He and Jamie stared at them closely. "My mother, the spy."

"Boys," Amanda cautioned, "remember what Lee said. This isn't lunchroom conversation. You can't tell your friends, even your girlfriend," she caught Phillip's eye for that one.

"We're relying on your secrecy. For your safety and for ours." Lee told them, trying to get across the seriousness, while downplaying the danger. They had decided jointly not to tell them about Adi Birol or Khai's family. The cases were still classified, anyway.

"I appreciate your candor, both of you," Dotty said, "but I am curious. Why now? Why, all of the sudden, are you telling us this?" Dotty could have sworn she saw a blush in her daughter's cheeks at that last question.

"Well, that's another part of this meeting," Amanda looked down, and placed her left hand over her right one. She had been hiding it since she walked through the door, wanting to wait until the bad news was delivered before bringing on the good.

Dotty noticed first, and gasped, clasping a hand to her mouth.

"What is it, grandma?" Jamie asked.

"Grandma noticed my ring, fellas." Amanda told her boys, holding out her left hand for them. "About two years after we started working together, Lee and I realized that we were slowly becoming more than just coworkers. Last month, Lee asked me to marry him. I accepted."

"Does any of this relate to your quitting your job at IFF?" Dotty asked.

"Is this the long story you were talking about at the hospital, Mr. Stetson?" Phillip asked, meeting Lee's eyes directly.

"Yes, and yes," Lee answered both of them. And then the questions began to come fast and furious. Each of them had questions, and Amanda and Lee tried their best to answer them in turn. When it was all over, Amanda and Lee were left alone in the living room, sitting side by side on the couch, her legs draped over his.

"That went well," Amanda sighed, taking her first deep breath in over two hours.

"The boys seemed a little out of sorts about us," Lee tried not to sound too disappointed.

"But Mother sure didn't. She claims she knew all about you - everything but your name." Amanda laughed at her mother's exuberance. "If she said 'I knew it' one more timeâ€¦"

"I know," Lee laughed, "but the boysâ€¦"

"They'll come around, Lee. You've known about them for years, but they've just met you. Give it a chance before you decide they think of you as the evil stepfather."

Amanda shifted around on the couch, and turned Lee's face to hers. "I love you."

"I love you, too, Amanda."

"Forever," they said in unison.

As their lips came together, Amanda felt complete for the first time in years. Wrapped in the arms of the man she loved, with no secrets between her and her family, Amanda sensed a true optimism for the future.

They separated at the sound of doors slamming overhead and the thunder of preteen feet coming down the stairs. Phillip and Jamie walked past them leaving only a "Bye, Mom. Bye, Mr. Stetson" in their wake.

That made them smile even more.

End
file.